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Sports



Sled Head Michael Douglas of the national skeleton team boards his sled during team selection races in Whistler last weekend. Photo by Joern Rohde www.wpnn.org. Published 2008-10-29 15:04:09

Sliding clubs ready for their turn

Local luge prospects get first change to ride ice this weekend

By Andrew Mitchell

While members of the national and development bobsleigh and skeleton teams got to test the Whistler Sliding Centre track last year, and have spent the past three weeks here learning the ins and outs of the world's fastest track, the legacy of grass roots luge, bobsleigh and skeleton programs is slowly being realized.

This weekend, up to 40 aspiring luge athletes aged 8 to 14 that have taken part in recruitment camps are invited to the Whistler Sliding Centre to try out the sport on ice.

Nicole Simon, a former Olympic luge athlete and program coordinator for the Canadian Luge Association, arrived in Whistler last February and has been working with the B.C. Luge Association, the B.C. Bobsleigh and Skeleton Association and the Track Club to build programs for all the sliding sports.

According to Simon, the aspiring luge athletes will have two days to ride an actual luge on ice. The recruits will be on ice from 2 p.m. to 4 p.m. on Saturday, and from noon to 2 p.m. on Sunday.

A handful of athletes did go to Calgary for a camp last year, but for most this will be a first.

"We will be starting a little lower, at curve 12 out of 16 curves, so there are only four curves," she said. "It's enough to get a taste of what the sport is all about in a safe way."

After the camp, interested athletes will be invited to join a domestic program that will train three times a week, evenings and weekends, from late November to the end of March. As well, Simon is hosting four more recruitment camps through the winter, hoping to fill a roster of around 40 kids.

The domestic program is limited by the amount of equipment and coaching available, but Simon would like to fill the program this year and expand it in future years.

As they learn, athletes will progress further and further up the course.

"They will progress pretty slowly. They have to get used to the sled and learn how it works, get used to the speeds, get everything dialed in at turn 12 and then progress in stages to various start heights," said Simon.

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